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Algonquin

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Algonquin

A BIRTHDAY ON FORTY-FOURTH STREET

Brendan Gill

Though the Avenues of New York are justly admired by visitors from all over the world, I would argue that the truest devotees of this incomparable city prefer its side-streets. The towers of Fifth Avenue, Madison Avenue, Park Avenue, Third Avenue, and the Avenue of the Americas leap up helter-skelter in a perpetual glittering rivalry of glass, steel, and stone, and their shop-windows offer a series of pocket-dramas as entertaining as any Broadway show. "Very fine indeed!" says the strolling connoisseur. "I'm delighted to pay my respects to all that skyscraping architectural bravado and strenuous salesmanship. Nevertheless, there are quieter pleasures to be met with in the city, even in the heart of supposedly turbulent Manhattan. It's these quieter pleasures that nourish me and that I've only to turn the corner of a busy Avenue to find."

Every lover of New York has his favorite side-streets. At the head of my list I put West Forty-fourth, between Fifth and Sixth. Having passed a large part of almost every day of my life there for well over forty years, I may be forgiven for boasting that I am not altogether unfamiliar with it. According to Aesop, familiarity breeds contempt, but when it comes to the relationship between West Forty-fourth Street and me the opposit effect has been achieved: we enjoy what amounts to a

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long and flourishing love-affair. At the time when I first went to work for *The New Yorker,* in the middle nineteen-thirties, the magazine was already occupying space, in what was to prove a permanently makeshift fashion, in the building at 28 West Forty-fourth Street. (The lobby of the building is an arcade that runs through the block; hence, the official address of the magazine has always been 25 West Forty-third Street.) Like any newcomer, I sought to make friends as quickly as possible with neighbors along both streets, and the neighbor that I wished most to become friends with was the Algonquin Hotel, where my elders and betters on *The New Yorker* were very much at home. Harold Ross, the founder and first editor of the magazine, ate there regularly, as did E. B. White, Katharine White, and a dozen or so of our best-known writers and artists. At twenty-two, I was eager to be thought one of them, so around lunchtime I would hasten into the lobby with the look of fearing to be late for an important engagement, circle the clusters of people seated drinking in the lobby, and then slip away to a near-by Bickford's for a cheese on rye. But in that brief, deceitful circuit, what gods and goddesses I would have encountered! H. L. Mencken, George Jean Nathan, Julie Haydon, Ina Claire, Benchley, Thurber—my eyes rolled in my head like marbles.

1977 marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Algonquin and among living patrons of the hotel there

cannot be many who remember it in the days of its youth, when mere newness was a part of its attraction. By the time I was beginning to secure a tentative foothold in that crowded lobby (the drink I would order was a side-car, because it was reputed to be the favorite cocktail of F. Scott Fitzgerald), the Algonquin gave the impression of being venerable; everything that one's hand touched, whether of mahogany, brass, marble, or cloth, had the feeling of being welcomely, affectionately crowned with age. The same feeling persists today. Over the years, many costly, invisible improvements have been made in respect to heating, plumbing, air-conditioning, and the like, and many costly—and highly visible—improvements have been made in the bedrooms and suites on the upper floors, but the heart of the hotel, which is to say its lobby, its three dining rooms, and its Blue Bar, remain seeemingly unchanged. The great black grandfather's clock stands in its accustomed place, sounding the hours in bass notes that a Chaliapin might envy, while men and women come and go in a flurry of salutations and blurred kisses, as if they were meeting or parting in the hall of some immense old English country house.

The magic by which the Algonquin outwits time, weaving the past and the present into a seamless whole, is practiced also by a number of its neighbors in the West Forties. New York is thought to be a city that continuously, recklessly throws itself down and builds itself up again

(says the visiting fireman, "It'll be a great place if they ever finish it"), but in fact there are many sections of the city where nearly everything one looks upon has remained contentedly in place for generations. A guest at the Algonquin who sets out for a stroll through the nearby streets will find that, ignoring the occasional impertinent high-rise, he is moving back through the years to the turn of the century and then, uncannily, beyond the turn. For example, on Forty-fifth Street, just behind the Algonquin, a private club for artists and writers called The Coffee House Club occupies the upper floors of two small brownstone houses that were erected no later than the eighteen-forties; it is pleasant to sit there in winter, surrounded by books and pictures, and listen to the hiss and snap of a wood fire burning in an old black Franklin stove. Again, if a stroller in search of the past were to glance across the Avenue of the Americas from the corner of West Forty-third Street he would catch sight of some large, boarded-up skylights emerging from the roofs of the buildings that face out on Forty-second Street. Those skylights once provided abundant north light for the artists who worked in studios there a hundred years ago.

In the eighteen-seventies, the site of the Algonquin was where wealthy owners of fast trotting horses foregathered before setting out for a spin in Central Park. The little brick building to the west of the hotel, whose ground floor

provides space for two of the Algonquin's dining rooms, was once a stable; so were the three little buildings that occur at intervals along Forty-fourth Street to the East of the Algonquin and that are currently occupied by restaurants and shops. In the eighties and nineties, many of the houses and stables on both Forty-third and Forty-fourth Street were demolished to make room for hotels, clubs, and private schools, since by then the neighborhood was coming to be regarded as among the most fashionable in town. The majority of these hotel and club buildings continue to exist, undiminished in their ability to impress the gawking outsider. One thinks of the tawny Renaissance facade of the Century Club, of the formidable stone temple that houses the Bar Association of the City of New York, of the Mechanics Institute, of the Harvard Club, and of the New York Yacht Club, whose second-story windows romantically pretend to be the high-pooped rear decks of seventeenth-century galleons. Daily, as I pass these buildings, I try to measure in my imagination the amount of merry and sad life they have contained. Now and again, I look up to see whether a ghost or two may not be peering out from the embrasure of a window; up to now, I confess, I have always looked in vain.

The Algonquin, designed by the well-known architect Goldwyn Starrett, opened in 1902 and was much admired for its elegant red-brick and limestone front. Though few people ever notice them, six large white lion's heads,

carved in stone, adorn the entablature of the cornice; the lions are surely African, but the hotel's thirty-six painted iron bay-windows have, to my eye, a distinctly Parisian air. From 1927 until his death in 1946, the hotel belonged to Frank Case; it was purchased from his heirs by Ben Bodne, who, with his wife Mary, lives in the hotel and presides over the lobby from a table near the entrance to the Rose Room. Mrs. Bodne makes an admirable wife for the proprietor of a hotel that is a favorite of scores of the most prominent actors, actresses, and playwrights alive: she claims she has never seen a play she didn't like. As might be expected, as a drama critic I am often in disagreement with her, but she cheerfully forgives me. Once, dressing for an opening, I discovered that I had forgotten to bring along a black tie. I told Mrs. Bodne of my plight and she at once dashed upstairs and brought down one of Mr. Bodne's for me to wear. Recently, both of the Bodnes converged upon me in the lobby to ask my opinion of a revival of "The Man of La Mancha". They told me first of all that they had liked it very much; what about me? I breathed a long sigh of relief. For I had liked it, too.

The Algonquin is, of course, not only a theatrical hotel. Throughout its long life, it has also played host to innumerable novelists and short-story writers, with their attendant editors, publishers, and agents. And it turns out that Mrs. Bodne has found it every bit as

easy to be hospitable to writers as to drama critics. One evening, she found herself riding up in the elevator with Thornton Wilder and William Faulkner. The men were silent and she glanced back and forth between them. "Don't you two boys know each other?" she asked. They didn't and she made the introduction then and there. Norman Mailer, Eudora Welty, Alec Waugh, John Updike—by now it's unlikely that they are in need of introductions under the Algonquin's uncannily capacious roof. Over the years, the Algonquin has sheltered many of the leading moviemakers of our time, especially from abroad. One sees in the lobby Eric Rohmer, Marguerite Duras, Costa-Gavras, Marcel Ophuls; one listens and thinks *ici on parle francais,* but the Germans and the Italians and the Swedes are also volubly on hand. As for the so-called intellectuals who frequent the Algonquin—the college deans, the judges, the men of science—they are content to be unknown to fame. Not every face one sees ought to be recognized; there is much to be said for a place that makes one feel happy among strangers.

West Forty-fourth Street is a friendly street; we are used to one another's faces and to one another's habits. Still, there are times when old friends can offer an agreeable surprise. Following the Con Ed blackout last summer, I went at an early hour to my office, only to be told that nobody would be admitted to our building until after the power had gone back on.

Disconsolately, I made my way to the Algonquin. To my astonishment, there were the Bodnes, comfortably seated in chairs on the sidewalk in front of the hotel. In the darkness of the lobby, the battery-powered emergency electric lights were growing dim; a few candles guttered on the tables. No matter—it was a fine day and the Bodnes in high spirits had decided to carry some of the lobby furniture outside and make a sort of drawing room of Forty-fourth Street. They had already asked a couple of guests of the hotel to join them for breakfast and they insisted that I should join them as well. We sat there drinking coffee in the bright sunlight, for all the world as if we were breakfasting on a leafy terrace in St. Tropez. The Bodnes had put in a strenuous night making sure that the guests of the hotel were as little inconvenienced as possible; now they were informally holding court. One of their breakfast companions was an English actor, making his first visit to New York. He spoke with awe of the shiny wonders of Fifth Avenue. I held out my arms as if to embrace not only our group but the hotel rising behind us. "There are those," I said, "who have reason to prefer the side-streets."

Brendan Gill, theatre critic for The New Yorker, *is chairman of the board of the Municipal Arts Society, chairman of the board of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources and a member of the Mayor's Commission for Cultural Affairs of the City of New York. He is also a habitué of The Algonquin.*

AVERY CLASSICS

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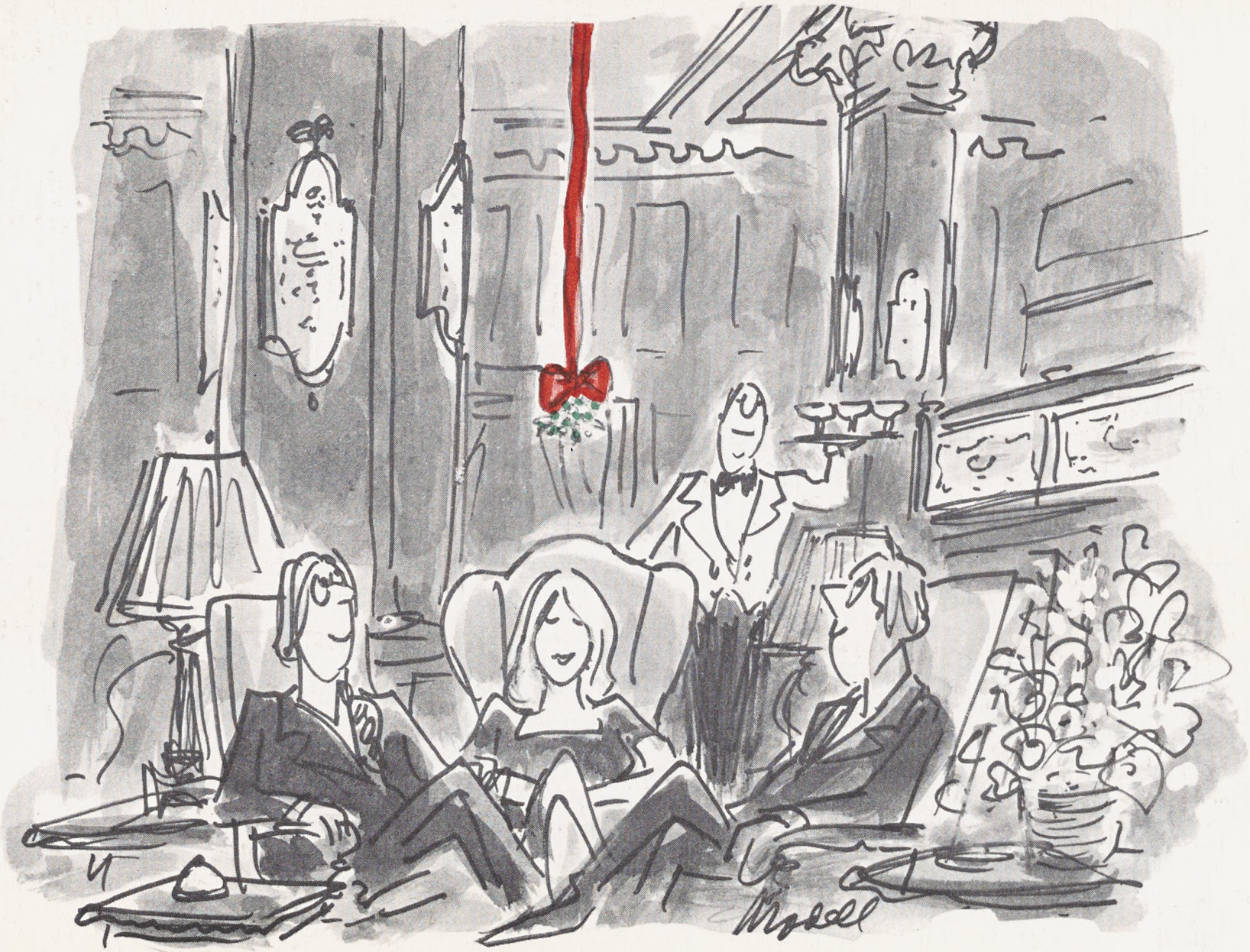
HOTEL
Algonquin

59 WEST 44TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036
212-687-4400

Many fine articles about the Algonquin have appeared widely this year, our 75th! One we particularly enjoyed and want to share with you, is this article by Brendan Gill, our neighbor at The New Yorker.

Ben B Bodne and Andrew G. Anspach



Christmastide at the Algonquin

Drawing by Frank Modell

Everything Good for the Holidays!!
Ben B. Bodne and Andrew A. Anpach

HOTEL
Algonquin
NEW YORK

Season's Greetings

and

Best wishes for a Happy New Year

from

All of us here at the Algonquin

SOME LAMPS AND THINGS IN THE ALGONQUIN LOUNGE AS SEEN BY JAMES THURBER

All Good Cheer this Holiday Season!!
Ben B. Bodne and Andrew A. Anspach

HOTEL
Algonquin
NEW YORK

Season's Greetings

and

Best wishes for a Happy New Year

from

All of us here at the Algonquin

Drawing by James Thurber © 1966 Helen Thurber. From Thurber & Company; Published by Harper and Row.

The Algonquin: Still the Literary People, Still the Good Food

By RAYMOND A. SOKOLOV

Restaurants reviewed on this page on Friday are rated both for their food (four stars to none) and for their atmosphere, service and décor (four triangles to none.)

★★▲▲▲**Algonquin Hotel,** 59 West 44th Street, MU 7-4400.

Tradition permeates the dark woodwork at the Algonquin. Foremost is the tradition of the famous Roundtable, at which Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott and other literary wags of bygone days gathered to exchange wit and vitriol. Then there is the tradition, at the New Yorker magazine down the block, that new employes must be asked by an older staffer before they go for their first professional drink at the Algonquin's wonderful bar.

The Algonquin also has a tradition of good food in its two dining rooms, which helps to explain the large number of Europeans who stay in its rooms.

Eating at the Algonquin is not, however, merely a matter of tradition. Literary people still value it. Norman Mailer has been known to tip the captain in the Oak Room even when someone else was paying for his lunch. Service is pleasant and fastidious, and the tone of both dining rooms is somewhere between stately and convivial.

The Oak Room is dark and masculine and long and narrow. The Rose Room is more spacious. The soundproofed ceiling has been painted the same shade of light red as the wallpaper. And the chains of the chandeliers are chastely enclosed in tubes of orange velvet.

Both the Rose and Oak Rooms use the same ample menu, which is international. At lunch, the offerings are relatively simple, at dinner the choice expands into more complex areas.

Appetizers do not vary according to time of day. The Senegalese soup, a curried vichyssoise ($1.25) is smooth and strongly curried. The jellied madrilene is dark red and attractive ($1.10). The pâté maison comes in two healthy slices with port aspic and hot, thin pieces of toast ($2.25).

Entrées are in the $4 to $7 range.

Cold salmon was not so opulent as its green sauce. The broiled sweetbreads with Virginia ham and mushrooms, however, made a first-class dish. The sweetbreads were fresh, crisply broiled and went very nicely with ham. Veal scaloppine Marsala could have been thinner, but the sauce was excellent.

For dessert, the chef makes an apricot and pecan torte that is original and worth the whole trip. It is a moist and splendid combination of tastes. Irish coffee is available, and there is a late supper served from 9:30 P.M. until the morning hours. The wine list is respectable and a Pommard, Clos de la Commeraine 1966 at $8.75, is a good way to wash down almost anything.

The Algonquin is closed Sunday, except for brunch, and accepts major credit cards.

★**Reuben's,** 6 East 58th Street, PL 9-5650. In its great days, Reuben's set the tone for "class" delicatessens across the country. It is still at its stellar midtown location, but, geography apart, this star of the corned beef world has aged badly.

Service is unequivocally poor. A waiter pulls out a table from the banquette—and leaves it out after guests have sat down. The c… tain has more the a… bouncer than som… helps you to … ers are n… the me… not … is…

Reuben's celebrated corned beef is no longer dep… and too often … when lea… ordina…

For the Weekend Ch…

In the menu below, the dish marked with an astrisk is followed by a recipe.

*Helga's Danish cucumbers with smoked chub**
Liver à la Veneziana
Sliced tomatoes and radish… vinaigrette
Chestnut purée with… cream

HELGA'S DA…
BERS WIT…

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2 teaspoons…
3 scallion…
3 table…
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Round Table, Square Heads?

Question: How to write a group biography of a bunch of smart, celebrated, and funny people—the literary cut-ups of yesteryear—if you basically disapprove of their martinified antics, shameless qolypromotion, and dearth of social conscience, and believe they betrayed their talents? Answer: Schizophrenically. Thus, John R. Gaines's "WIT'S END: Days and Nights at the Algonquin Round Table" (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $12.95), in which the author's interesting but rather dour judgments play seesaw with a nifty array of amusingly captioned photos and cartoons. In the one above, done in 1923, Round Table groupies gawk at the likes of Robert Sherwood (hoping for a seat), Heywood Broun and Franklin P. Adams (noses far left and right), Marc Connelly (shocking Johnny Weaver in the foreground), and Dorothy Parker, George S. Kaufman, Alexander Woollcott, and Horace Liveright (across the back). Notable absentees include Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, and Harpo Marx—but they're quite possibly under the table. Of Woollcott, James Thurber once said, "old vitriol and violets," which I like. Ditto this eccentric but engaging book.

NONFICTION IN BRIEF

By Barbara Shulgasser

NYT BK REV 4/5/83

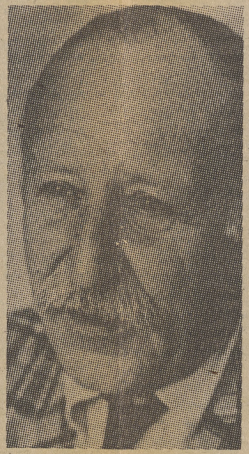
WHOSE LITTLE BOY ARE YOU?

A Memoir of the Broun Family. By Heywood Hale Broun. Illustrated. 215 pp. New York: Marek/St. Martin's Press. $14.95.

Next best to being a fly on the wall from which to file dispatches for posterity is being a child among famous grown-ups. Such was the position of Heywood Hale Broun, who writes "Whose Little Boy Are You?" from the mostly below-waist-level vantage of a child treated as "equal" by his progressive parents and their witty chums. In this volume, a memoir from under the Algonquin Round Table, Mr. Broun tells of the casual parental practices of two of the table's wits: his mother, Ruth Hale, and his father, Heywood Broun. The memories are remarkably easy to read, considering how difficult it must have been for the author to bring them to the surface.

Heywood Broun, founder and president of the Newspaper Guild, sports writer, drama critic and, most memorably, a columnist for The New York World, is described by his son as a reserved man who found his jocular voice only on paper. It was quite a voice: Ten thousand people attended his funeral. He did not communicate as well with his son, whom he mentioned frequently in his column as a sort of substitute for direct contact. No wonder that son Woodie feared he would never measure up to his father's expectations for him.

His mother, "better at bugle calls than at lullabies," was a feminist who battled the State Department to carry a passport bearing her own rather than her married name. America's first female movie critic, a correspondent for The Chicago Tribune and The New York Times and a contributor to Vogue, she sometimes wrote the column that ran under her husband's byline. She abandoned her profession after the birth of her only child, inflicting upon him lifelong guilt for thwarting his mother's brilliant career. As if feelings of inadequacy with regard to one parent and guilt over another were insufficient burdens for Woodie, Ruth demanded a divorce, the final punctuation to an erratic marriage. Their son sums up the relationship: "They probably shouldn't have gotten married; they probably should never have had a child; and they probably shouldn't, after seventeen years of marriage, have gotten divorced."



Heywood Hale Broun.

The Brouns moved in a circle that specialized in writing, singing, composing and, when all else failed, "guesting," or the art of graciously accepting hospitality. In this social milieu, Woodie, as he tells with some relish, was called upon to pour punch for the likes of Dorothy Parker, Franklin P. Adams and Paul Robeson. But Mr. Broun is no mere anecdote-monger; his memoir is a purgative examination of his failure in the eyes of his parents. It is a painfully honest book. Now in his 60's and a CBS-TV correspondent, Mr. Broun has by ordinary standards achieved success. Yet he recalls his childhood embarrassments with the urgency of one who still feels the hurt.

THE SCANDAL THAT MADE THE DEV

Books of The Times

By John Leonard

WIT'S END. Days and Nights at the Algonquin Round Table. By James R. Gaines. Illustrated. 251 pages. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $12.95.

Alexander Woollcott

TOWARD THE END of his psychobiopsy on 1920's Rose-Roomers at the Algonquin Hotel in New York, James R. Gaines—as if he were being nagged, as if afraid someone might rain on his parade of generalizations—is moved to demur: "It could be argued (and no doubt will be) that the writers of the Round Table did precisely what they were capable of doing—no more, no less. Still, it is hard to think that the group had no effect on their capabilities, and easy to see how the group's will helped some of its members succumb to currents in the time that they might successfully have resisted as individuals."

Yes, it is hard to think. Might not the ambitious, insecure and desperately needy Alexander Woollcott, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Harold Ross, George S. Kaufman, Heywood Broun, Marc Connelly, Donald Ogden Stewart, Franklin P. Adams and Robert Sherwood—out to naked lunch together almost every day from 1920 to 1932—have conspired at a smogball that obscured and inhibited their genuine talent? Shouldn't there have been more loneliness and less logrolling? More wisdom and fewer wisecracks?

A Dual Influence

Having hardly thought, Mr. Gaines is sure: "Social and literary ambitions do not seem peaceably to coexist in many writers. The light of most such double-burning candles is dim and fleeting. The Algonquinites were urged to nourish both by novel social and historical circumstances: they were among the first writing celebrities of a new mass culture, an accredited 'smart set,' just the thing for a changing high society."

Mr. Gaines feels that Benchley and Parker could have done better, and that Woollcott, Ross and Adams could hardly have done worse, had they ate, drank and slept less, and played fewer games of poker and croquet, with one another. Unlike their "literary peers"—Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hemingway and so on—they failed to deliver on their promise because (1) they somehow missed the terrible point of World War I, and (2) they enjoyed the company of the rich and well born far too much.

I believe that every writer, so long as he or she is out of prison and has enough to eat, is responsible for the murder of his or her talent; not even carnivorous mothers need apply as villains. I also believe that people who missed the point of World War I, and people who liked horses and money more than they liked people who had neither, are unlikely to be worth much as writers.

In other words, to blame your failure of character on the company you keep is just another failure of character. To be sure, Parker and Broun and Stewart moved to the left politically in the 30's, and Robert Sherwood would feel bad in a Stevensonian moodiness. And Woollcott was such a monster of affection and sadistic fiddlefaddle that he ought to have been locked into a closet with a mirror and a mushroom. But such people find, and leave, their own groups. To be inhibited by a committee is to be the sort of person who can't, anyway, be alone with art.

More: Mr. Gaines seems to be saying that wit itself is a denial—of war, of Depression, of class strife, of wretched reality. Again, like a failure of character, it isn't necessarily so. Wit can be a marching order, the best of slogans. And without it we must slog, as in Sherwood's serious plays, through a forest of mossy pieties. We must also, as in this book, hack our way through a prose-vegetation in need of brutal pruning.

"A new social hybrid was bred in the common soil of alcohol." "His [Swope's] concomitant ambivalence about being Jewish was one of Woollcott's favorite targets." "Through their connection to Swope, the Algonquin group came into the full hue of the socially chosen." "The Fitzgeralds were at their then worst." "That they had good times worth remembering and retelling now is a certain, happy fact, but it is hard, on close retrospect, not to feel that all their high-pitched antics and wonderful talk were pyrrhic triumphs, that the end of wit was a resounding silence."

On close retrospect, it is hard not to feel a concomitant ambivalence about a book that is alternately weepy and scourging on a demimonde of the magazine and gustatory worlds, circa Coolidge. The wonderful photographs, and the wicked captions, tell us more than is necessary about these commercials for themselves. Literary celebrity is indeed a problem, for the public and the celebrity. It happens not to be a problem of literature, but of character. Twaddle is its own reward. If Mr. Gaines has anything pertinent to convey, it is his sense of the menace of the salon. London, Paris, Weimar and various Chinese imperial courts sit around as evidence. But not as excuses.

#1 BESTSELLER

CITY DESK ON B'WAY

By Leo Shull

DOROTHY PARKER

Although the women's lib movement has proliferated since the days of Dorothy Parker, it has not spawned any lady humorists, strange to say. When you speak of professional humorists, Miss Parker is the only femme you can think of.

* * *

She was, in later years, rich, famous and powerful; she had two husbands, four lovers (public), and scores of "passing romantic hitch-hikers," a mansion in Beverly Hills, a country estate in Pennsylvania, and a series of apartments in New York. She was the central figure, the only lady, of the celebrated Algonquin Hotel Round Table. She was half Jewish, which led to this scene one day: Alexander Woollcott was making some anti-Semitic remarks and George S. Kaufman pretended to be angry; he left the dining table, strode to the door, and when he got there, turned and said to Miss Parker: "You ought to at least come with me half way."

Toward the end she sought only younger men, and married one 20 years her junior; with him she wrote many famous films.

* * *

When she was told one day that Coolidge had just died, she said, "How can they tell?"

Born prematurely, she told people, "It was the first and last time I arrived early for anything."

She said: "A poem is compressed imagery."

"I write five words and erase seven."

"One more drink and I'll be under the host."

"I'd like you to meet Tuesday Weld's mother, Mrs. Weldsday."

"Brevity is the soul of lingerie."

* * *

When she reached 70, she told her husband, "Promise me I won't get old."

She went to Catholic school, and "I was fired from there because I answered my teacher's question with 'the Immaculate Conception was spontaneous combustion.'"

This Algonquin group was very fond of word games, and Doro-

(See Page Four)

CITY DESK

(From Page Two)

thy beat them at it: "Horticulture . . . you can lead a horticulture, but you can't make her think."

She had an office with Robert Benchley, and when he left for Hollywood she was so lonely that she put a sign on her door, "Men."

"I was just a little Jewish girl trying to be cute; I became the toast of two continents—Australia and Greenland."

One day she walked into a speakeasy and the bartender said, "What are you having?"

"Not much fun," she said.

"The big, wide West," she said, "begins in New Jersey."

One day she found herself pregnant. "Serves me right," she said, "for putting all my eggs in one bastard."

The guy sent her $30 towards the operation. "Judas made a refund," she observed.

* * *

COMING: JOE E. LEWIS

Quote: "Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law . . . behind every great girl is a great behind . . . ."

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ontinued on Page 3, Column 1

Federal officials estimate that about $425-million in highway

Continued on Page 18, Column 1

P. G. Wodehouse Is Dead on L.I. at 93; Creator of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster

2/15/75

The New York Times/David C. Berliner

P.G. Wodehouse last month after he was knighted.

By ALDEN WHITMAN

P. G. Wodehouse, one of this century's most prolific, popular and durable writers of light fiction, died of a heart attack last evening in the Southampton (L.I.) Hospital. He was 93 years old and lived in nearby Remsenburg, a village on Long Island's South Shore.

Although he wrote of Bertie Wooster and Bertie's friend and valet, Jeeves, and an England that never existed, the author was actually a United States citizen.

But last New Year's Day, Queen Elizabeth II made him, along with Charlie Chaplin, a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Thus he became Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, rather than P. G. Wodehouse, a more modest name, which he preferred.

The Queen's honor was taken as perhaps an official act of forgiveness for wartime broadcasts. Under contract to the Columbia Broadcasting System while he was held in Berlin by the Nazis, he had made a series of humorous broadcasts to the United States.

There were explanations later, and there was even a formal exoneration by the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in the House of Commons in 1944, but the issue refused to die.

"I never did return to England, you know," Sir Pelham said a few weeks ago, commenting on the knighthood. "After I lived in New York we

Continued on Page 32, Column 1

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Cont

P. G. Wodehouse, Novelist, Dies on L.I. at 93

Continued from Page 1, Col. 3

moved out here, and I became a citizen in 1956 over in Riverhead."

Over the years he turned out close to 100 novels, perhaps 500 articles and essays, some 16 plays, as well as screenplays and lyrics for musical comedies.

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse had a cultivated aptitude for devising hilarious incidents of controlled incongruity as well as a talent for creating memorable comic characters. These abilities, along with a genius for antic dialogue, lifted him into the ranks of the great humorists.

His parodies of life among the British aristocracy and the well-to-do, set vaguely in the early years of the reign of King George V, verged on social satire and earned him an American audience that rivaled his British one. Moreover, although his books suffered in translation, he had readers in virtually every major language.

"The first thing to remark about Mr. Wodehouse's art is its universality," Evelyn Waugh once observed. "He satisfies the most sophisticated taste and the simplest."

Two characters among the hundreds developed by Wodehouse are indelibly associated with his name—Bertie Wooster of the Drones Club and Jeeves. "In these two characters [Wooster the likable idiot and Jeeves his protector] Wodehouse discovered the perfect expression of his comic talents," according to Richard J. Voorhees's "P. G. Wodehouse."

In the score of novels dealing with Wooster, his family and friends, all of whom are touched with zaniness, it is Jeeves who leads his seigneur and employer out of his scrapes. "We must think, sir," Jeeves says in one of the novels. "You do it," replies Wooster. "I don't have the equipment."

Fresh for 50 Years

Wodehouse's fecundity was such that he managed to keep the Wooster-Jeeves escapades fresh for half a century.

Three other major comic personalities flowed from Wodehouse's clever brain—Lords Emsworth, Marshmoreton and Ickenham (also known as Uncle Fred). Lord Emsworth raised prize pigs and pumpkins; Lord Marshmoreton, who squirted whale oil on insects, was always at work on a family history; and Lord Ickenham, a 60-year-old gaffer, constantly cavorted as a schoolboy. Blandings Castle was their habitat.

And there were minor characters galore: Psmith, Gussie Fink-Nottle, Sir Roderick Glossop, Puffy Benger, Galahad Threepwood, Hermione Brimbe, Lord Blicester, Boko Bickerton and Stiffy Byng. In their Wodehouse world, the laws of cause and effect were suspended; the absurd was the real; the fanciful the factual. And their conversation had a wild, non sequitur quality, as the following example from "The Clicking of Cuthbert" indicates:

"'Suppose, for instance, that he could be made to believe that you were . . . a dypsomaniac.'

"'She shook her head. 'He knows that already.'

"'What!'

"'Yes; I told him I sometimes walk in my sleep.'

"'I mean a secret drinker.'

"'Nothing will induce me to pretend to be a secret drinker.'

"'Then a drug fiend?' I suggested hopefully.

"'I hate medicine.'"

In an interview in 1969, Wodehouse (he pronounced it Woodhouse) denied that he was a satirist, explaining that "satire wounds" and that he was just a genial funnyman. George Orwell made much the same point in an essay in 1945. The humorist, Orwell remarked accepts the Establishment while exploiting the comic possibilities of the aristocracy. He makes its members ridiculous not immoral or contemptible. Lord Emsworth is an earl rendered comic by his lack of dignity; part of the humor in the Bertie Wooster stories arises from the master's inferiority to the servant.

A Happy Writer

Wodehouse, whose nickname was Plum, Pelham with an elided "e," was a happy writer, with a sense of vocation. "From my earliest years I had always wanted to be a writer," he said. "It was not that I had any particular message for humanity. I just wanted to write, and was prepared to write anything that had a chance of getting printed."

The future novelist was born Oct. 15, 1881, in Guildford, England, the son of a Hong Kong civil servant. He was reared in a genteel society ("My mind is fragrant with memories of kindly footmen and vivacious parlor maids") and sent to Dulwich College as a step toward a career in the Royal Navy.

His years at Dulwich, then a small but distinguished Victorian school, were delightful, and they provided the background for seven of his first 12 books. Indeed, elements of Dulwich life appeared in many of his novels over the years.

Because of a decline in his family's finances, Wodehouse went from school to the London office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank instead of toward the Royal Navy. Demonstrating a spectacular ineptitude for figures, he left the bank after two years to write a column for the old London Globe. His banking experiences, however, were stored up for such novels as "Psmith in the City."

To supplement his newspaper wages, Wodehouse wrote freelance stories for boys' magazines and for Strand, a popular monthly that also published Arthur Conan Doyle and H. G. Wells. His first novel, "The Pothunters," a collection of his school stories, appeared in 1902. "Mike," another school novel, published in 1909, is generally considered Wodehouse's best of that genre.

Hilton Picture Library

P. G. Wodehouse in London in 1928 in an automobile that belonged to Ian Hay, his collaborator on "A Damsel in Distress," one of his many shows.

Lived at 'Village' Hotel

Meanwhile, he had visited the United States on a holiday in 1904. He returned in 1909 and immediately sold two stories, one to Cosmopolitan and the other to Collier's. Encouraged, he left The Globe and holed up at the Duke Hotel in Greenwich Village to make his fortune. But success did not come easily, and for five years he cranked out potboilers, detective fiction (he was a lifelong devotee of crime stories) and drama criticism for Vanity Fair.

Finally, in 1914, Wodehouse struck success when The Saturday Evening Post serialized "Something Fresh," the first in the Blandings Castle series of novels. In all the magazine published 21 Wodehouse books raising his fee from an initial $3,500 to $40,000.

The Post not only enriched him financially, but also enhanced his literary style. George Horace Lorimer, The Post's editor, helped Wodehouse learn to cut and rewrite his stories and to improve his scenes.

A man of boundless energy, Wodehouse found time between writing for The Post and other slick magazines of the day to become a lyricist for musical comedies. With Jerome Kern, whom he had met in Britain, and Guy Bolton, Wodehouse worked on musicals for the Princess Theater starting in 1915. At one time he and Kern and Bolton had five Broadway shows and 12 companies on the road.

Wodehouse also whipped off lyrics for Victor Herbert, Franz Lehár, George Gershwin, Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml.

And in the nineteen-twenties Wodehouse was as much in the theater as he was in his study. He not only wrote plays with Bolton, but he also adapted such foreign dramas as Ferenc Molnar's "The Play's the Thing." Among the actors for whom he wrote were Douglas Fairbanks, John Barrymore, Leslie Howard, Gertrude Lawrence and Tallulah Bankhead.

Jeeves and Luxury

Wodehouse's celebrity in the theater matched his popularity as a writer, which reached new heights in 1919 with publication of the first Jeeves book, "My Man Jeeves." His talents were in constant demand, and his wallet bulged. He tasted the delights of luxury and travel—with his wife, the former Ethel Crowley, whom he had married in 1914, and their retinue of maids, dogs, birds and cats. He lived briefly in English country houses, on the French Riviera, in New York and in Hollywood.

Wherever he was, he wrote. The plots might change, but not the milieu, nor the characters. Once taxed as being unduly fond of earls, he replied:

"Well, of course, now that I come to tot up the score, I realize that in the course of my literary career I have featured quite a number of these fauna, but as I often say—well, perhaps once a month—why not?

"Show me the Hon. who by pluck and determination has raised himself from the depths, step by step, and I will show you a man of whom any author might be proud."

As for his fondness for butlers, he remarked:

"Butlers have always fascinated me. As a child I was raised on the fringe of the butler belt. And all through the years these men have piqued my curiosity. Mystery hangs about them like a nimbus. How do they get that way? What do they think about?"

Off to Hollywood

Fame also brought him new friends — Arnold Bennett and Hilaire Belloc, the writers; and Winston Churchill. And actors. He spent two stints in Hollywood, for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1930 and for R.K.O. in 1936. He admired movie people, but he found the job of writing scripts more than he could bear.

But from Hollywood, as from the theater, he drew characters for his novels and sharpened his ability to construct his stories from a series of scenes in which dialogue predominated. These experiences also confirmed the strong tendency of his fiction to deal with a fanciful world in which all problems were amusingly solved.

Wodehouse took his Hollywood experience in stride. Writing of his first year among the movie-makers, he said:

"I had a year's contract, and was required to do so little work in return for the money I received that I was able in the 12 months before I became a fugitive from the chain gang to write a novel and 14 stories, besides brushing up on my golf, getting an attractive suntan and perfecting my Australian crawl in the swimming pool."

The darling of his readers and of a small group of intellectuals, Wodehouse was nonetheless ignored by literary critics until Oxford conferred a Doctor of Letters on him in 1939. Thereafter, it was perceived that he was an artist in light fiction, a humorist who was serious.

War Broadcasts Denounced

The author's reputation took a tumble during World War II. Living at Le Touquet, France, when the war broke out, he was interned by the Germans and sent to a camp at Tost, in Upper Silesia. After almost a year he was brought to Berlin and housed in the plush Adlon Hotel. He recorded five talks on prison-camp life that were broadcast over the German network in the summer of 1941. In Britain (and to a lesser extent in the United States), Wodehouse was denounced as a Hitlerite and a traitor who had sold out for release from internment camp.

Wodehouse spent part of the war in Paris, where he was arrested in 1944 by the French police in charge of treason and collaboration matters. After a couple of years, the case was quietly dropped, seemingly at the intercession of such well-placed friends as Malcolm Muggeridge, the British writer, and Wodehouse left for the United States.

Afterward, Wodehouse's friends made strenuous efforts to rehabilitate him. Muggeridge, Orwell and Evelyn Waugh came to his defense. It was said that the novelist was naive and apolitical, that his broadcasts made fun of the Nazis and that he was duped.

Although his critics eventually felt that treason was too strong a charge to be laid on Wodehouse, they agreed that at best he was singularly thick-skulled in failing to realize the implications of his broadcasts. Wodehouse, in later years, steadfastly declined to discuss the episode; but in July, 1961, Waugh attempted to clear the air by defending his friend in a British Broadcasting Corporation program.

Meantime, Wodehouse continued to write. "Money in the Bank" sold 26,000 copies in Britain in 1946, and the American edition of "Joy in the Morning" did equally well. In the nineteen-fifties and sixties his Nazi flirtation was all but forgotten.

Resembling a perfect uncle, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, Wodehouse retained his physical and mental vigor into his late 80's. He attributed this to regular exercise, which consisted of performing a "daily dozen" calisthenics prescribed by Walter Camp in 1919 and daily walks. He also credited his octogenarian acuity to cold martinis, two before lunch and two before dinner.

Like many humorists, Wodehouse was a good deal funnier on paper than he was in conversation. But he was remarkably objective about himself.

"Writing my stories — or at any rate, rewriting them—I enjoy," he said not long ago, adding:

"It is the thinking them out that makes the iron enter into the soul. You can't think out plots like mine without getting a suspicion from time to time that something has gone seriously wrong with the brain's two hemispheres and that broad band of transversely running fibers know as the corpus callosum.

"I always have to make about 400 pages of notes before I can get my scenario set, and there is always a moment, as I read them over, when I pause and say to myself, 'Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.'"

STEPHEN STRONG, 68, TRIAL LAWYER, DIES

Stephen Van Rensselaer Strong, a trial lawyer who had represented the Pennsylvania Railroad, died Wednesday at his home in Piscataway, N.J. He was 68 years old and also lived at 1150 Fifth Avenue.

Mr. Strong was a senior partner in the New Brunswick (N.J.) law firm of Strong & Strong & Gavarny. The original firm of Strong & Strong was established by his grandfather Woodbridge Strong in 1852.

Mr. Strong was formerly prosecutor for Middlesex County, N.J., and attorney for Piscataway and Jamesburg, N.J. Active in Republican politics, he had been a member of the Republican State Committee of New Jersey.

Surviving are his widow, the former Marianne Schappert; five brothers, Theodore, Woodbridge, Robert, Philip and John, and two sisters, Cornelia L. Va... R. Strong and Mrs. Morris Ulman.

Agnes I. O'Neil, 77, Di... Pioneer in Early Child...

Agnes Inglis O'Neil, a ... in early childhood ca... education, died last Su... a nursing home in Man... N. Y. She was 77 yea...

Mrs. O'Neil helped ... the Windward Scho... Plains and the Geor... School in Washingt... interracial school i...

In the nineteen... served as educat... of the communi... the Resettlemen... tion in Washing... schools in ne... She was also a... Field Foundati... conditions for...

Surviving a... Anthony, Tin... a brother, ... grandchildre...

DAVID DIRINGER, 74, EPIGRAPHY EXPE...

Dr. David Diringer, pro... emeritus of epigraphy ... bridge University, die... day in Cambridge, En... was 74 years old an... in Tel Aviv.

Dr. Diringer, wh... life to research ... nings of writin... Alphabet Mu... bridge and ... Haaretz Mu... three years ... cover pre... present d...

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REP. JERRY PETTIS DIES IN AIR CRASH

Coast Republican Aided in Audio-Digest Foundation

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif., Feb. 14 (AP)—Representative Jerry L. Pettis was killed today when a private plane he was piloting crashed, the Air Force reported. He was 58 years old.

Rose Camaria, the Congressman's administrative assistant, said the plane was down near Beaumont, Calif., and the San Bernardino County Sheriff's department said it had found the wreckage of a plane near the city.

Mr. Pettis is survived by his widow, the former Shirley Cumber; a son, Peter, and two daughters, Jan and Deborah.

Developed Tape ...

Jerry Lyle Pettis ... year-old self-made ... when he was ele... House of Repres... the first time in ... after having be... radio announcer ... and assistant to ... of United Airli... became interes... lem that physi... ing to keep u... of new medic...

A medical ... him that no... cian could f... even 1 per ... in some 6... nals publi... Mr. Pettis ... a tape ... work in a... make ta... most imp... as they w...

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Mr. P... Phoenix, A... He gradu... Union Co... graduate ... versity of ... In World ... flight ins... the Air T... the Pacif... of the A... tion.

Mr. P... large ave... near San... Day Adv... ber of ... Congres... litical c... Republi... conside... accordi...

JAME... LED ...

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He ... direc... and ... 19... a...

Books of The Times

By John Leonard

WIT'S END. Days and Nights at the Algonquin Round Table. By James R. Gaines. Illustrated. 251 pages. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $12.95.

TOWARD THE END of his psychobiopsy on 1920's Rose-Roomers at the Algonquin Hotel in New York, James R. Gaines—as if he were being nagged, as if afraid someone might rain on his parade of generalizations—is moved to demur: "It could be argued (and no doubt will be) that the writers of the Round Table did precisely what they were capable of doing—no more, no less. Still, it is hard to think that the group had no effect on their capabilities, and easy to see how the group's will helped some of its members succumb to currents in the time that they might successfully have resisted as individuals."

Yes, it is hard to think. Might not the ambitious, insecure and desperately needy Alexander Woollcott, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Harold Ross, George S. Kaufman, Heywood Broun, Marc Connelly, Donald Ogden Stewart, Franklin P. Adams and Robert Sherwood—out to naked lunch together almost every day from 1920 to 1932—have conspired at a smogball that obscured and inhibited their genuine talent? Shouldn't there have been more loneliness and less logrolling? More wisdom and fewer wisecracks?

A Dual Influence

Having hardly thought, Mr. Gaines is sure: "Social and literary ambitions do not seem peaceably to coexist in many writers. The light of most such double-burning candles is dim and fleeting. The Algonquinites were urged to nourish both by novel social and historical circumstances: they were among the first writing celebrities of a new mass culture, an accredited 'smart set,' just the thing for a changing high society."

Mr. Gaines feels that Benchley and Parker could have done better, and that Woollcott, Ross and Adams could hardly have done worse, had they ate, drank and slept less, and played fewer games of poker and croquet, with one another. Unlike their "literary peers"—Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hemingway and so on—they failed to deliver on their promise because (1) they somehow missed the terrible point of World War I, and (2) they enjoyed the company of the rich and well born far too much.

I believe that every writer, so long as he or she is out of prison and has enough to eat, is responsible for the murder of his or her talent; not even carnivorous mothers need apply as villains. I also believe that people who missed the point of World War I, and people who liked horses and money more than they liked people who had neither, are unlikely to be worth much as writers.

In other words, to blame your failure of character on the company you keep is just another failure of character. To be sure. Parker and Broun and Stewart moved to the left politically in the 30's, and Robert Sherwood would feel bad in a Stevensonian moodiness. And Woollcott was such a monster of affection and sadistic fiddlefaddle that he ought to have been locked into a closet with a mirror and a mushroom. But such people find, and leave, their own groups. To be inhibited by a committee is to be the sort of person who can't, anyway, be alone with art.

Alexander Woollcott

More: Mr. Gaines seems to be saying that wit itself is a denial—of war, of Depression, of class strife, of wretched reality. Again, like a failure of character, it isn't necessarily so. Wit can be a marching order, the best of slogans. And without it we must slog, as in Sherwood's serious plays, through a forest of mossy pieties. We must also, as in this book, hack our way through a prose-vegetation in need of brutal pruning.

"A new social hybrid was bred in the common soil of alcohol." "His [Swope's] concomitant ambivalence about being Jewish was one of Woollcott's favorite targets." "Through their connection to Swope, the Algonquin group came into the full hue of the socially chosen." "The Fitzgeralds were at their then worst." "That they had good times worth remembering and retelling now is a certain, happy fact, but it is hard, on close retrospect, not to feel that all their high-pitched antics and wonderful talk were pyrrhic triumphs, that the end of wit was a resounding silence."

On close retrospect, it is hard not to feel a concomitant ambivalence about a book that is alternately weepy and scourging on a demimonde of the magazine and gustatory worlds, circa Coolidge. The wonderful photographs, and the wicked captions, tell us more than is necessary about these commercials for themselves. Literary celebrity is indeed a problem, for the public and the celebrity. It happens not to be a problem of literature, but of character. Twaddle is its own reward. If Mr. Gaines has anything pertinent to convey, it is his sense of the menace of the salon. London, Paris, Weimar and various Chinese imperial courts sit around as evidence. But not as excuses.

Restaurants / Jane O'Reilly

THE ALGONQUIN—WHERE THE TWENTIES MEET THE SEVENTIES

"...The Algonquin lobby, constantly maintained to look slightly rundown, is the perfect embodiment of the hotel's charm . . ."

If Mo Udall, Tom Stoppard, Kyle Rote, and Ellen Burstyn are all in the same room, the room must be in New York. If your college roommate's first husband and the person you're thinking might be right to back your next project and a woman you mistake for your Great-aunt Martha are also in the room, then the room is the lobby of the Algonquin Hotel.

This is the Algonquin's seventy-fifth year, and New York should strike a medal in honor of its unique contribution to city life.

Forty-fourth Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues is scarcely an urban garden spot, but it carries interesting traffic. The Harvard Club, the New York Yacht Club, and the New York Bar Association are down the block from the venerable hotel; the City University of New York Graduate Center, the Princeton Club, and Broadway are around various corners; and *The New Yorker* is across the street. The Algonquin is the confluence, the place where all the intellectual currents flow together, swirl around, then flow back out, freshened up and vital.

Consider that famous rendezvous, the lobby. It is the perfect embodiment of the Algonquin's charm, a charm that must in fact be the result of the craftiest kind of calculation. Constantly maintained to look slightly rundown, the lobby is something like Great-aunt Martha's sitting room turned into a refugee area after a natural disaster.The tables and stuffed chairs are at odd angles to the little oak tables with brass bells affixed to their tops. The finish of the tables has the wonderful depth of old-fashioned grade-school desks. It is with real surprise that one realizes there is no roaring fire.

The welcome is not always warm, the service not always swift—especially after five o'clock on weeknights—but free, albeit uninteresting, hors d'oeuvre are passed during the cocktail hour, and no one exhibited the slightest unwillingness to replenish the cracker bowl when I occupied a large section of the rush-hour space one evening with my son, his homework, and our coats.

"We are a family hotel," says manager Andrew Anspach, who is also the son-in-law of owner Ben Bodne. "We're old-fashioned on the outside, and very sophisticated underneath. . . . But we love children." In fact, as far as I could tell, the best way to guarantee excellent service is to bring along a few children.

One afternoon I was sitting in the far corner of the lobby, in the wing chair that is almost inside the Rose Room. Behind me, a famous publisher was dining, rather ardently, with his former wife. In front of me, one of his principal employees was explaining, rather loudly, why the famous publisher was a detestable employer. Next to me a man apparently unknown to any of them was taking notes.

Which goes to show that you should be very careful what you say in the lobby of the Algonquin.

You should also be fairly careful about choosing the Algonquin for an illicit romance: The rooms are small and noisy, although recently refurbished with the hotel's characteristic blend of fusty and charming. And the elevator doors open directly into the lobby, so after a tryst you will find yourself standing there in full, well-lit view of at least four people you know.

There are always four people you know in the lobby of the Algonquin. Unless the people you know all wear pastel double knits. Vintage Brooks Brothers and high alternative chic are the accepted styles. Should you inquire, you will be told that ties and jackets are requested, but the management—ever crafty—has somehow succeeded in instructing the staff in the subtle difference between rock chic and Port Authority reject. Leather jackets and photographer's bags and blue jeans will, if properly assembled, do nicely.

The Round Table where Parker, Benchley, Ferber, et al., lunched back in the twenties is now only one of several round tables in the center of the north part of the Oak Room. It is true that the "phantom of 44th Street," *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, comes to lunch in the Rose Room, but most of the literati have dispersed to the Teheran restaurant and the Nakagawa Japanese restaurant down the street, or to the CUNY Graduate Center cafeteria. Many of them sleep at the Royalton, across the street, and continue to drink at the Algonquin.

Well, sometimes Round Table types still lunch at the Algonquin. Who doesn't? What they eat for lunch is a problem I am reluctant to get to. The Algonquin's menu is very large and freshly printed every day, reminding us that afternoon tea is from three to five in the Oak Room, that the traditional buffet supper in the Rose Room and the Lounge runs from 9:30 P.M., and that the Rose Room is open on Sundays for brunch until 2:15 P.M. Despite an occasional phrase like *"à la francaise,"* the menu is really American. Now, good American cooking is one thing New York City needs. Unhappily, the Algonquin does not really provide it.

The waiters, when asked for suggestions, will mention the day's special, which is not always good, and the seafood salad ($8.75), which usually is fresh and varied, but was served, when I tried it, without lemon and seemed to need salt. Many things seem to need salt at the Algonquin, including the Strasbourg pâté ($7, enough for two), the vegetables ($1.75–$2.75), and the roast-beef hash ($5.95), which is very good otherwise—chunky and chewy. The roast beef ($10.50), even rare, is tough, and its juiciness once was complemented by canned consommé. The vegetables, except for the creamed spinach, are really better not mentioned. "Soggy" is the word one *would* mention.

Algonquin regulars urge one to try the chef's salad ($5.95), which is pretty good—a large, unpretentious heap of things including what seemed to be real turkey under a dressing of tarragon, oregano, dry mustard, oil, and *sometimes* vinegar—one night it had none at all. Another favorite with the regulars is the broiled striped bass ($7.85), always fresh and flaky, served with a little dish of dill mustard on the side.

Lobbying: *Enjoying the après-theater supper buffet are Andrew Anspach (standing) and (clockwise from left): Cecilia Hart (of* Dirty Linen*); her husband, Bruce Weitz; Jacob Brooke* (Dirty Linen)*; Marc Flanagan; Brooke's wife, Rustie Mitchell. Seated on sofa in background are John Cullum and Jill Andre of* The Trip Back Down.

Photographed by Dan Wynn

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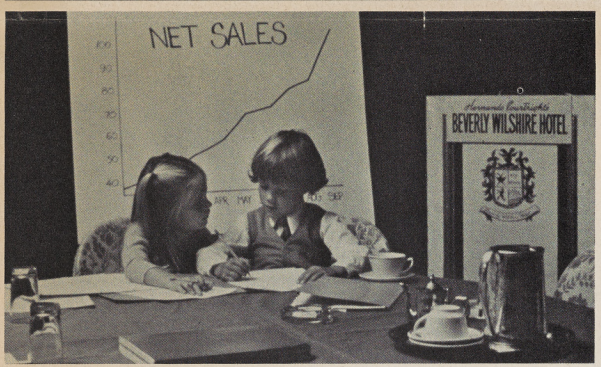

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The supper buffet, which looks as if it is going to be a delightful smorgasbord to splash through, is in fact a matter of rather costly choice. The salads, such as apple-and-walnut ($6.25), are not as good as church-supper salads, and they should be. A Viennese apple pancake ($6.50) was served without confectioner's sugar and was not caramelized on the bottom. But it might have tasted better if anyone at the table had noticed the lingonberry sauce before it was too late.

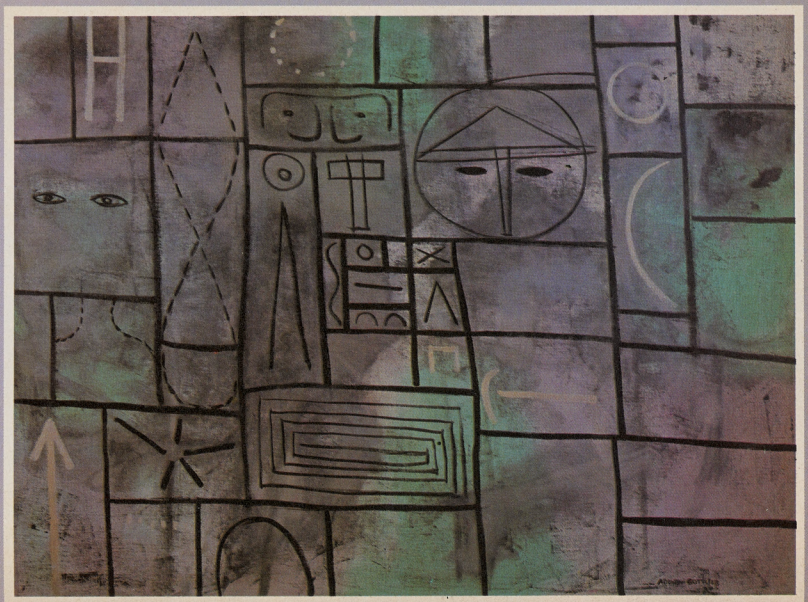
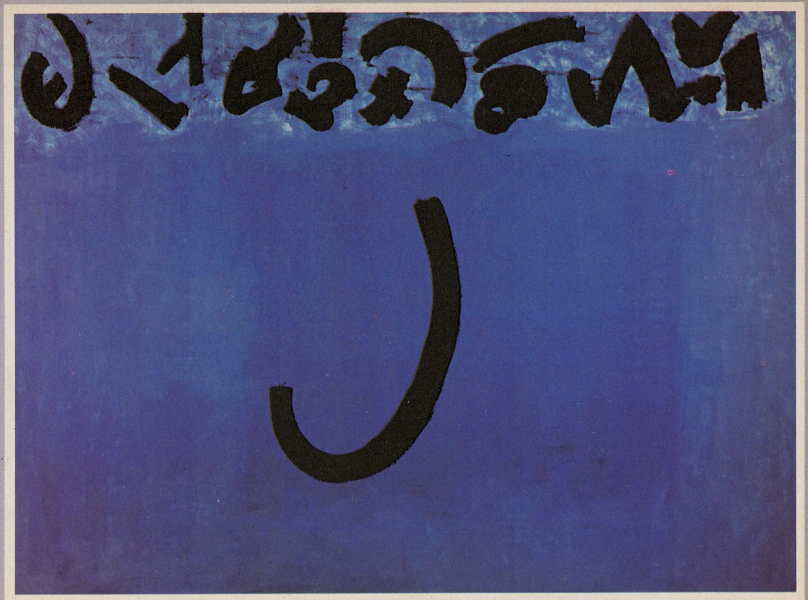
In moments of acute sensual deprivation, I have dreamed of the hotel's coconut-iced, lemon-filled, very American layer cake ($2.50). Unfortunately, the only moist piece I have tasted lately was part of Mr. Anspach's serving. At tea, lunch, and dinner, my own slices were ready to crumble into dry bits. The layer cake has been replaced in my dreams by the apricot-and-pecan torte Chantilly ($2.50), which is nothing but ground pecans, whipped cream, and apricots—and heavenly. On the other hand, the starchy, sticky cherry and apple pies ($2.50) would have been sent back in disgust by any discerning patron of an interstate diner.

The wine list is very good and inexpensive, though small: An excellent 1970 Chambertin was $9.50, a nice Pouilly-Fumé, $8.25. The Algonquin's prices, in the standard New York range these days, are moderate at lunch and moderately expensive at dinner. However, the dinner prices seem a bit steep, considering the quality of the food and the service (the waiters don't pay very close attention to empty water glasses or plates).

Reservations are usually essential, and the rush hours (12:30, 6:30, and 10:30 P.M.) are not the time to try to strike up a meaningful relationship with the headwaiters. However, three or four visits will make you a regular, and it's ever so cozy after that.

Perhaps the fact that some of the food is quite good and some very bad is part of the overall management scheme, a way to avoid being such a *completely* desirable establishment that the home-away-from-home quality would be overwhelmed. And, frankly, I'm in favor of anything that will preserve the hotel's ambience for another 75 years. As four members of the National Book Critics Circle said to me: "Oh, the food at the Algonquin has been terrible for years, but it doesn't matter."

Algonquin Hotel, 59 West 44th Street, 687-4400. Breakfast, 7:15 to 11:45 a.m.; Sunday brunch, noon to 2:15 p.m.; lunch, noon to 3 p.m.; afternoon tea, 3 to 5 p.m.; dinner, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.; supper, 9:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. American Express, BankAmericard, Diners Club, Master Charge.



Suggestive symbols: *Primitive pictographs that animated Gottlieb's work around 1950, as seen in* Labyrinth, #2 *(above), gradually shifted into a kind of abstract calligraphy, such as enlivens his 1956 painting* From Midnight to Dawn *(below).*